



AsianWeek
.com

HOME

FEATURE

NATIONAL

BAY AREA

BUSINESS

SPORTS

ARTS & ENT.

OPINION

Calendar

Talk-Talk

Archives

Media Kit

Contact Us



[Click for our latest cover](#)



[Buy our Year of the Snake poster!](#)

AW



NATIONAL & WORLD NEWS STORY

[Home](#) | [National & World News Section](#)

Oct. 5 - Oct. 11, 2001

Civil Liberties in Jeopardy

Former internees speak out against harassment of Arab Americans

By Mark Sherman/AP

The hurt has subsided, but there still is anger in Rep. Michael Honda's voice when he says his family was singled out because "we looked like the enemy."

Honda, D-Calif., was talking about the detention of Japanese Americans during World War II. But he said he could just as easily have been describing the experience of people of Middle Eastern descent in the two weeks since the terrorist attacks.

Arab Americans have been stopped by police, forced to leave airplanes and, in some cases, subjected to violence.

Honda, a freshman, and fellow Rep. Robert Matsui, D-Calif., in his 12th term, say they feel a special duty to speak out against harassment of Arab Americans following the terrorist attacks because of their families' experiences during World War II.

"We have a particular responsibility based upon a unique experience," said Honda, 60, who was moved with his parents from California's Central Valley to a compound in Amache, Colo., ringed with barbed wire and armed guards.

Matsui said he shuddered when he heard the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks being compared to Pearl Harbor. It's not that he found the analogy inapt. Rather, he said, it was a reminder of what can happen to civil liberties in times of crisis.

"In the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, no one spoke out," Matsui said.

The two congressmen were infants when their parents were forced from their homes and into internment camps in what the government has since acknowledged was a bigoted effort borne of war hysteria.

TOP STORIES

[Historical Election for New York City's Largest Asian Neighborhood](#)
(in National News)

[The Fight for Mint Mall](#)
(in Bay Area News)

[New UC Irvine Golf Program Unfazed](#)
(in Sports)

[Apature 2001](#)
(in A&E)

[Emil Amok: The New Style of Internment](#)
(in Opinion)

The Supreme Court, in a wartime ruling that has never been overturned, upheld the forced relocation of 120,000 Japanese Americans. But in the late 1980s, Congress apologized and set aside about \$20,000 for each of the internees or their heirs. Matsui and Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta, then a member of Congress who also was held in a camp as a child, led the drive.

Matsui's American-born parents were in their early 20s when they were moved from Sacramento to an internment camp at Tule Lake, Calif., which held nearly 19,000 people at its peak. No one in the Matsui household spoke of the experience for nearly 40 years.

"It wasn't until my mother was on her death bed in 1984 that she said she had nightmares about the camps," Matsui, 60, recalled in an interview. "She'd wake up and think she was still in them."

That silence is one reason why Honda and Matsui said they feel obligated to call attention to reported instances of apparent racial profiling, the practice of singling out people based on their appearance.

They also said that they are closely watching the Bush administration's proposal for more anti-terrorism measures. "Under the Constitution of the United States, we have an obligation to give people due process," Matsui said.

Both said they have been pleased by the denunciation by President Bush and other government officials of threats and attacks against Arab Americans and Muslims.

One discordant note was the comment made last week by Rep. John Cooksey, R-La., who used derogatory language to call for the questioning of all turban-wearing airline passengers. Cooksey has since apologized.

Honda said such language is "irresponsible." And he worries that the nation may not have seen the worst of harassment of Arab Americans.

[Top of This Page](#) ▲

[National News Section](#) ▲

[AsianWeek Home](#) ▲▲

[Feature](#) | [National](#) | [Bay Area](#) | [Business](#)
[Sports](#) | [Arts & Entertainment](#) | [Opinion](#)

©2001 AsianWeek. The information you receive on-line from AsianWeek is protected by the copyright laws of the United States. The copyright laws prohibit any copying, redistributing, retransmitting, or repurposing of any copyright protected material. [Privacy Statement](#)